



NVTC

Northern Virginia Transportation Commission

June 12, 2013

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Kelley Coyner

The Honorable John McGlennon
Chairman
Transit Service Advisory Committee
c/o DRPT
600 East Main Street, Suite #2102
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Chairman McGlennon:

The Transportation Service Delivery Advisory Committee has an important and challenging task of advising the Commonwealth Transportation Board and the Department of Rail and Public Transportation on how to develop a transit operating assistance formula that is tied to effectiveness and efficiency measures. The success in developing such a scheme depends on a number of critical factors including:

- 1) Identifying the key objectives or outcomes sought through transit service in the Commonwealth;
- 2) Selecting a small set of easy-to-use metrics that indicate whether these outcomes are being reached; and
- 3) Developing sound, verifiable data that supports the use of these metrics.

As noted by *A Guidebook for Developing a Transit Performance-Measurement System* commissioned by the National Academy of Sciences Transportation Research Board, "(t)he reliability of performance-measure results directly depends on the quality of the data used to calculate the measures."¹ To achieve such reliability there needs to be commonly applied definitions, verification of data, and an appropriate level of uniformity in how data is reported and presented.

As I noted in the second public comment period at the June 3rd meeting of the Advisory Committee, there are several key items to keep in mind as the Committee moves ahead in this important work.

First, the availability of reliable, uniform, trusted data is critical for any performance measure system. As North Carolina State University observed: "In order for funding to be allocated equitably through a formula, all transit systems must collect the same data, using the same methods, compile it identically, and report it using a consistent format. Absent any one of these critical steps, the data will be flawed, and there will be resulting inequities using such data in the application of a formula to allocate funding."²

Second, transparency with respect to data is key to ensuring accuracy and building trust in the efficacy and equity of any new allocation scheme. All data that is being used to test an allocation scheme should be shared with localities and operators to allow for the verification of the information. In addition, the source of the data and the clear identification of the system to which the data belongs should also be shared. This is fundamental to building confidence in the effort.

Third, explicit, written definitions of all data elements should be shared. These definitions need to align with how data is now collected. The National Transit Data System provides a common set of definitions for data including data that the Advisory Committee is currently considering as possible components of a funding allocation scheme. These elements include items such as operating costs, passenger miles, and seat miles.

While the availability of good data is not guaranteed, it is nevertheless a prerequisite to developing any type of allocation scheme that is equitable. Only by using sound data can an allocation scheme be developed that will deliver on its promise to improve efficiency and performance. Good data is especially critical when the performance metrics will be used to allocate vital transit funding. These funds allow transit systems across Virginia to provide transportation that takes people to work, promotes economic growth, reduces congestion, and ensures that everyone who needs transit has access to it.

I appreciate the work of the Committee Members and am glad to address any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Kelley Coyner

¹ Kittleson & Associates, Inc., Urbitran, Inc., LKC Consulting Services, Inc., MORPACE International, Inc., Queensland University of Technology, & Yuko Nakanishi. (2003). *TCRP Report 88: A Guidebook for Developing a Transit Performance-Measurement System*. Washington, DC: Transportation Research Board, p. 12. Available at http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_report_88/Guidebook.pdf.

² Cook, T.J., & Lawrie, J.J. (2004). *Use of Performance Standards and Measures for Public Transportation Systems*. Raleigh, NC: Institute for Transportation Research and Education, p. 33. Available at <http://www.itre.ncsu.edu/ITRE/research/documents/PerMeas.pdf>.